

Are People Really “Born Gay”?

Can someone really be “born” gay? Is there a “gay gene”? Does biology equal destiny?

Clearly, the controversy over this issue is huge in our culture. While pro-gay activists and their allies want us to believe people are “born gay” and that sexual orientation is an unchangeable characteristic like race or eye color, a closer examination of the scientific evidence reveals that the “nature vs. nurture” debate over homosexuality is far from settled.

At best, the evidence for a genetic and/or biological basis to homosexual orientation is inconclusive. In fact, since the early 1990s, numerous studies attempting to establish a genetic cause for homosexuality have not proven to be valid or repeatable – two important requirements for study results to become accepted as fact in the scientific community.

Because of this, the current thinking in the scientific community is that homosexuality is likely caused by a complex interaction of psychosocial, environmental and possible biological factors. And the two leading national psychiatric and psychological professional groups agree that, so far, there are no conclusive studies supporting any specific biological or genetic *cause* for homosexuality.¹

In sum, there is no scientific or DNA test to tell us if a person is homosexual, bisexual or even heterosexual for that matter. And since nobody is “born gay,” it’s clear that sexual orientation is, at its core, a matter of *how one defines oneself* – not a matter of biology or genes.

But what about the studies I’ve heard about in the media that say people are born gay?

While the media’s headlines and reporting of these studies have given the impression that science is closing in on a “gay gene,” it’s important to note that each study suffers from significant problems and limitations. And what the researchers themselves have said about their own work is important. Specifically, you should know that their comments have never been fully reported in the press.

Some examples:

- From the 1991 Hypothalamus (Brain) Study, Simon LeVay, who self-identifies as gay, said: “It’s important to stress what I didn’t find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn’t show that

¹ “Fact Sheet on Gay Lesbian Bisexual Issues,” the American Psychiatric Association, May 2000; and “American Psychological Association Online: Answers to Your Questions/Topic – Sexuality/What causes a person to have a particular sexual orientation?,” www.apa.org/topics/orientation.html.

gay men are born that way, the most common mistake people make in interpreting my work. Nor did I locate a gay center in the brain.”²

- And from the 1991 Twins Study, Richard Pillard – also a gay man – admits: “Although male and female homosexuality appear to be at least somewhat heritable, environment must also be of considerable importance in their origins.”³
- And from the 1993 X Chromosome Study, Dean Hamer – also a gay man – said: “...environmental factors play a role. There is not a single master gene that makes people gay...I don’t think we will ever be able to predict who will be gay.”⁴
- And from the 2005 Fruit Fly Study, Barry Dickson, the lead researcher, admitted that the understanding of how innate behaviors are genetically determined is “rudimentary at best.” He also admitted that the male-male courtship behaviors they observed probably involved “environmental and social stimuli” and that the female-female courtship behavior was abnormal – missing some key steps.⁵
- And what about the 2005 male and 2006 female pheromone studies from Sweden that gay activists claimed were more evidence of a biological basis to homosexuality? (Pheromones are chemicals that can be smelled and are known to influence animal behavior. However, their role in humans is unknown.) Here, it is significant that Ivanka Savic, the lead researcher, said that the 2005 study had nothing to do with proving homosexuality to be biological. And regarding the 2006 study, she said “it is very important to make clear that the study has no implications for possible dynamics in sexual orientation.”⁶
- More recently, Dr. Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, summed up the research on homosexuality saying that “sexual orientation is genetically *influenced* but not *hardwired* by DNA, and that whatever genes are involved represent *predispositions*, not *predeterminations*” (italics added). As a comparison, Collins said that the potential genetic component for homosexuality is much less than the genetic contribution that has been found for common

² David Nimmons. “Sex and the Brain,” *Discover Magazine*. March 1, 1994.

<http://discovermagazine.com/1994/mar/sexandthebrain346>

³ <http://www.narth.com/docs/senatecommittee.html>

⁴ N. Mitchell, “Genetics, sexuality linked, study says,” *Standard Examiner*, April 30, 1995.

⁵ Ebru Demir and Barry Dickson, “*fruitless* Splicing Specifies Male Courtship Behavior in *Drosophila*,” *Cell*, Vol. 121, 785-794, June 3, 2005.

⁶ Nicholas Bakalar, “Link is Cited Between Smell and Sexuality,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2006, and <http://www.drthrockmorton.com/article.asp?id=146>, with quote by researcher Ivanka Savic from *Chicago Tribune*, May 9, 2005.

personality traits such as general cognitive ability, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness, aggression and traditionalism.⁷

Clearly, the case for a “gay gene” has not been made.

So, do all gay people believe that sexual orientation is “fixed” and unchangeable?

Not by a long shot. While it’s true that many homosexuals and their allies believe that people are “born gay” and cannot change, there exists a surprising – and not insignificant – minority of gays and lesbians who recognize that sexual orientation is, in fact, flexible. For example, Kate Kendell, director of the National Center for Lesbian Rights, argued in the gay magazine *Frontiers* that sexual orientation is not fixed. And lesbian columnist and psychotherapist Jackie Black has said that sexuality is not static. Further, lesbian author Camille Paglia argues that homosexuality is not normal and that it is an adaptation, not an inborn trait.

Most recently, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force spokesperson Roberta Sklar admitted in an ABC news story that today’s young lesbians and bisexuals have a “more flexible view” about sexuality and see it as “a fluid thing.”⁸

Thus, while no one knows for sure what causes a homosexual identity to develop, recent research confirms that permanent change is, indeed, possible. Pro-gay ally Dr. Robert Spitzer of Columbia University is now convinced that many homosexuals have successfully changed their sexual orientation. In 2001, he published results from a study of 200 gay men and lesbians who had sought “re-orientation” therapy. Spitzer found that most have been able to achieve fulfilling heterosexual relationships. While his research shows that such change often involves a long and difficult journey, it is nevertheless possible for highly motivated individuals.⁹

Even more recently in 2007, a landmark study was published by Drs. Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse which concluded that it is possible for homosexuals to change their physical attractions and that such efforts to bring about change do not appear to be psychologically harmful. Entitled *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation*, this groundbreaking research has been hailed by

⁷ <http://www.narth.com/docs/nothardwired.html>

⁸ www.abcnews.go.com/US/LifeStages/story?id=3484082&page=1 and www.townhall.com/columnists/KevinMcCullough/2007/08/19/radical_gay_activist_we_lose?page=full&comments=true.

⁹ R. L. Spitzer, “Can some gay men and lesbians change their sexual orientation?” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 32(5), 403–417, 2003, and R. L. Spitzer, “Psychiatry and homosexuality,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2001.

experts from both sides of the debate as being the most methodologically rigorous to date.¹⁰

And as more evidence of the fact that people can and do change their sexual orientation, Exodus International, a group of more than 150 Protestant Christian ministries in the United States and around the world, represents literally tens of thousands of people who have made the choice to walk out of their homosexual and bisexual identities. Similar organizations exist for Roman Catholics (Courage), Mormons (Evergreen), Jews (JONAH) and Muslims (StraightWay).¹¹

Even in the secular cultural arena we see evidence of well-known people who have clearly changed their sexual orientation. Examples of formerly gay-identified celebrities who reportedly have become involved in relationships with people of the opposite gender include actors Anne Heche and Julie Cypher. Apparently, the reality that people can change their sexual identity isn't just a right-wing Christian thing.

Clearly, pro-homosexual advocates and their allies aren't dealing with all the evidence in their insistence that people are "born gay" and cannot change.

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¹⁰ Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse, *Ex-Gays? A Longitudinal Study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 2007.
www.ivpress.com/media/exgays-pr-09042007.php; www.bpnews.net:80/BPnews.asp?ID=26429

¹¹ www.exodus.to; www.couragerc.net; www.evergreeninternational.org; www.jonahweb.org;
<http://straightway.sinfree.net/>